

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – Mar. 4-8, 2013
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Readers of DCQW should know the name William C. Stokoe. And some readers will be familiar with his name sign; a cupped hand tapped on the right side of the head.

What type of name sign is this?

- a) A name sign based on his middle name which begins with a “C”
- b) An Arbitrary Name Sign
- c) A Descriptive Name Sign
- d) An Initialized Name Sign

Go to the bottom of this message for the answer.

Answer: “c” – William C. Stokoe, as readers of DCQW know, is considered the “Father of American Sign Language Research.” He published *Sign Language Structure* (1960) and co-authored *A Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistic Principles* (1965). These groundbreaking works were considered heretical at the time of their publication. And, of course, over time his claim that the signing of deaf people is a language has proven to be prophetic.

Stokoe's name sign is classified as a Descriptive Name Sign (DNS) by the schema proposed by Dr. Sam Supalla in his text, "*The Book of Name Signs*." DNS name signs are based on a distinctive physical characteristic of the person they are bestowed upon. These names signs have no connection to a person's given name as in using one or more first letters of the person's name. These latter name signs are called "Arbitrary Name Signs (ANS) by Supalla.

The cupped hand tapping on the right side of the head, which describes Dr. Stokoe's name sign, represents the cockade-type bonnet (hat) worn by Scots and which Dr. Stokoe wore around the campus of Gallaudet especially when he would practice his bagpipes in the early mornings.

Stokoe was given this name sign by his deaf colleagues and students at Gallaudet. A name sign bestowed by one's Deaf colleagues, friends, associates or students is a mark of a person's membership in the Deaf community. This is the only proper way of obtaining a name sign.

Read more about this pioneering hearing ally of Deaf people here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Stokoe and here:

<http://deafness.about.com/od/signlanguage/p/stokoe.htm>

References:

Supalla, Samuel J. (1992). *The Book of Name Signs*. Berkeley, Calif.: Dawn Sign Press.